

# A visit with Gary Magnuson

## Chairman of the School Committee

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**G**ary Magnuson is a busy father of two, juggling family and work responsibilities with those as chairman of the School Committee. On the heels of DHS graduation, the Clipper caught up with Gary and talked about everything School Committee-related, from bullying to the building of the new high school.

### THE MAGNUSON FILE

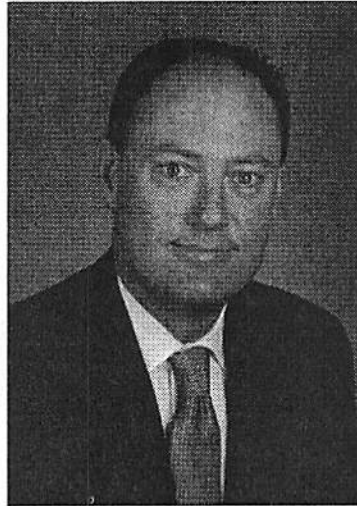
**Family:** My wife and I have two great kids

**Favorite Book:** "The Lost Symbol" by Dan Brown

**Favorite Movie:** Caddy Shack

**Pet Peeve:** Being late

**Hobbies:** Fishing, golf, spending time on our boat with my family, skiing



Gary Magnuson

**What do you hope to see the building of the new high school bring to Duxbury?** I hope that the building will become a community resource that will be the centerpiece of our academic campus. It should be a building that we are proud of and will serve the educational needs of our kids for many years to come. The School Building Committee is doing a fantastic job, and I am confident that the final design will be impressive, functional, but also fiscally responsible.

**How does the committee come to an agreement on controversial issues?** All School Committee issues are discussed in public at our meetings. Many times the members are in agreement on issues, however occasionally there are differing views. You can listen and respect other opinions, but need to vote in a manner that you believe is best. The majority rules on split votes. When split votes occur the members need to back the decision of the majority. You can't take differing votes personally, we are all volunteers, working hard

at what we think is best for the schools.

**You were involved in the decision to choose a new superintendent; what was important to you in the person selected?** I felt we needed a strong educational leader, a good communicator, and someone with a strong record of improving academic achievement. Finding a new superintendent that could recruit, develop, and retain high quality teachers was also important. I am pleased that we were able to find Dr. Tantillo and I believe he is off to a great start. Hiring a new superintendent has allowed us the opportunity to bring in a leader with new ideas and best practices from other schools.

**What kinds of issues are at hand in Duxbury schools, and how do they differ among the elementary, middle, and high schools?** Thankfully we have quality schools, but there are always opportunities for improvement. For example, we are implementing new curriculum frameworks across the grade levels that will improve connectivity between grades and also bring greater project based and interdisciplinary learning opportunities. I would like to see an enhanced focus on STEM initiatives (science, technology, engineering, and math) from the elementary to high school levels. As a first step, DHS is offering a robotics class for the first time this fall. Budget challenges are always prevalent, as we are operating in a difficult economic environment so we need to allocate our limited resources efficiently.

**What experience/qualities do you have that make you a successful person in this role?** First of all, to be a successful School Committee member, you must have a passion for improving the quality of the education for all the kids in the Duxbury school system. You need to be good listener, communicator, and collaborator. You need to keep an open mind to consider differing points of view, and have the confidence to make difficult but informed decisions. Problem solving, organizational and administrative skills are also important. Over the years my professional and nonprofit board experience has allowed me to practice all of these skills.

**How do you feel Duxbury's school system compares to other towns on the South Shore? Obviously, comparisons depend upon the schools and the measures you are using for comparison. When I look at comparisons, I look at how we stack up against the best schools in the state. Duxbury has high performing schools; though if you look at certain quantitative measures like SAT and MCAS scores, we have some work to do if we want to rank as one of the best. However, these are**

just two measures that do not tell the whole story. We are kicking off a strategic planning process this month. As part of this process, I hope we will establish a peer group of schools that we will measure ourselves against using a variety of measures over a period of time. Additionally, as part of the strategic planning process we will define "stretch" goals for our schools that will be based upon improving academic performance.

**Has bullying been brought up? If so, how has the Committee been involved in implementing policies and punishment for acts of bullying?** Last year the state passed legislation that required all school systems to have a Bullying Prevention plans and policies. We formed a task force composed of teachers, administrators, and members of the public to develop the plan and policy, which was approved by the School Committee in December 2010. I was the School Committee representative on that task force. There are detailed procedures for the reporting of incidents, monitoring, and responding to bullying in the plan.

**How do you feel about iPads and Kindles being used as part of school curriculum?** I think bringing current technologies into the classroom and the learning process is essential. Kids pick up new technologies very quickly, and using technology is essential in academics and in the workplace. We recently saw a fantastic demonstration of how we are using iPads as educational tools with special education students.

**How do you balance your responsibilities on the School Committee with those as a parent and as a professional?** It's a challenge. I have a demanding job, and I take my School Committee responsibilities very seriously. Thankfully, my employer encourages community involvement, and family is very understanding about my work and School Committee commitments. Much of my School Committee work is done at night, weekends, or early mornings – which encroaches on family time. I also believe that we have five highly competent School Committee members who can represent the interests of the School Committee as a whole. As a result, it's not necessary for all School Committee members to attend every meeting and event that relates to the schools.

**What is the most enjoyable part of your job as Chairman of the Committee?** Visiting the Chandler School and reading to the Kindergarten children.